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ABSTRACT

Bibliographers and librarians are aware of the new information technologies in information storage and retrieval. CD-ROMs and online database systems are two technologies used daily to assist users in accessing needed information. Although these resources are lacking in the fields of journalism and mass communication, possibilities for computerized resources do exist: the Communication Abstracts could be transferred to an online or CD-ROM format; a new clearinghouse that is specific to journalism and mass communication instruction could be created in ERIC; and/or an electronic bulletin board could be created to facilitate the sharing of user education resources. (DB)

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THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES: WHAT ARE THEY, HOW CAN WE GET THEM, AND WHY DON'T WE HAVE THEM?

Ralph A. Lowenthal

ABSTRACT:

As bibliographers and librarians, we are aware of the new technologies in information storage and retrieval. CD ROMs and online databases are two technologies used daily to assist patrons, yet where are these resources in the fields of journalism and mass communication? Possibilities for computerized resources do exist, and this presentation will explore several likely avenues. The Communication Abstracts could be transferred to an online or CD ROM format, a new clearinghouse could be created in ERIC, and/or an electronic bulletin board to facilitate the sharing of user education resources could be created.

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INTRODUCTION:

Presently, in the field of journalism and mass communication, librarians and bibliographers use new technologies in information storage and retrieval to assist patrons. As providers of information, we have found that by using online databases and CD ROMS we can supply our patrons with annotated bibliographies of information tailor-made to their needs. We have also discovered that the microcomputer has made our work easier in that we now can generate book lists, customized inhouse bibliographies, and other user aids in a fraction of the time that we used to spend. The act of updating the previously mentioned work has also been simplified; we no longer need to retype a whole bibliography when one new source is added.

We have, however, also found limitations in the new technologies. As bibliographers of mass communication, we have found that we must search several databases related to our patrons topic--ERIC, Social Science Citation Index, and Arts and Humanities Citation Index, for example--to find relevant research. At conferences and in discussions with our fellow bibliographers and librarians, we find that they have created bibliographies and user aids that we have also created--thus reinventing the wheel over and over again. I intend during the course of this presentation to explore several ways that we can more effectively use the new technologies to better serve our patrons and what we can also do to ensure the future availability of these assets. My three main areas of discussion will be 1)

the transferring of the Communication Abstracts to an automated form, either online or CD ROM format; 2) the possibility of creating a new ERIC clearinghouse that is specific to journalism and mass communication instruction; and, finally, 3) the feasibility of organizing an electronic bulletin board to facilitate the sharing of bibliographies and other user education materials amongst ourselves.

DATABASES & CD ROMS.

Over the past five to ten years, libraries have experienced the computerization trend. We--as members of the profession and as users of library resources--have seen the advent of the computerized card catalog and the automation of many of the standard indexes and abstracts. When publishers of reference works began to convert their printing operations from typeset to computer set images, the idea of manipulating the stored information in other medias began. The establishment of DIALOG and BRS in the early 70's opened new vistas for patrons and librarians alike in finding relevant information. Boolean logic, databases, descriptors, and other computer jargon became also library jargon. The new Information Age was upon us all; but for the bibliographer and librarian in the fields of the humanities and social sciences, the promises of the new age come slowly. We saw the sciences quickly develop databases to fulfill their needs. Databases like Metadex and Chemical Abstracts quickly came about to serve scientific research. More slowly came the "hard" social sciences; Psychological Abstracts and ERIC (Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse) were developed

to help the social science researcher. Finally, in the early and mid 80's, the Arts and Humanities Citation Index and the MLA Bibliography became available to the humanities. But where does that leave us in the journalism and mass communication field? There is no database specific to our field. We must either search multiple databases in the humanities and social sciences in hope of finding material useful to our patrons' research, or we must resort to referring our patrons to a limited set of printed indexes and abstracts in our area. In fact, the major index in our field has yet to be transferred to a computerized format. The Communication Abstracts--while published since 1978--is not yet available through any major online vendor. We in the Mass Communication Bibliographers organization (MCB) must now demand that Sage Publications provide their computer tapes to DIALOG and/or BRS. We need to convince our teaching faculty that they too must join us in demanding the needed automation. We must, moreover, communicate our needs to the database vendors. When we attend a vendor's workshop or when we contact a vendor, we must tell them what databases we need on their systems. I personally have found that the online vendors are very receptive to individual user comments and suggestions; surely they will respond to our concerted call of action.

In addition to the online services, there are now CD ROM (compact disk, read only memory) databases. The CD ROM when paired with the microcomputer offers our patrons for the first time the chance to independently perform automated bibliographic searches. Most major university and college libraries have now

purchased CD ROM work stations and have placed them in public service areas. We see again, however, that our particular field has been left behind. The sciences and the social sciences dominate the CD ROM field, and we must make do with databases that treat journalism and mass communications as only secondary topics. I do not hold the producers of the automated products solely to blame for the situation that we are in. Librarians and professors do not actively endeavor to provide for our patrons; we wait instead for the producers to come to us while we should be going to the them. If a company can make a full text database or create a CD ROM formatted index for any of the other social sciences or humanities fields, then they can and will also eventually develop an automated system for journalism and mass communication. It is for us to insure that such a system is developed now.

CLEARINGHOUSES

One of the ways we can assist in having databases and CD ROMS created for our area is to encourage the creation of pools of information concerning our field. One possible way to do this is to formally petition the creation of a new clearinghouse in the ERIC database. Presently, ERIC is made up of sixteen clearinghouses ranging from Adult, Career, and Vocation Education to Urban Education. The only clearinghouse that comes near serving the needs of the journalism and mass communication field is the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, but the mission statement in the 11th edition of the Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors for this clearinghouse does not

mention journalism as a defined area of the social sciences. While there is no clearinghouse in ERIC that deals specifically with journalism, we can be happy in knowing that journalism and journalism education are used as descriptors approximately 4500 times. We may want to ask ourselves why there is no clearinghouse for our area; or we may ask why our area is not clearly defined within one of the established sixteen clearinghouses. The answer is simply that as librarians and as educators of journalism and mass communication we have not stated plainly our need for recognition. In order to form a clearinghouse in ERIC, we need to present to the governing body of the ERIC system a course of action and the means to fund that course. How many times at conferences have we bragged to each other about funding that we have received from a private or corporate donor? If we wish to use the new technologies, then we must be ready to fund them on both the institutional level and the national level. I propose that we as a national group communicate our needs to the above donors in order to get start up funds for an ERIC clearinghouse. The donors, I believe, will be willing to assist with donations and grants when we make clear to them that the people who will most benefit from a clearinghouse are their future employees. Not only corporate sponsors but also the Department of Education can be brought into the funding pipeline through grants in aid to improving the level of education in our schools and universities. The creation of a clearinghouse will also require the cooperation of our schools of journalism. The production of a clearinghouse--the selecting,

indexing, and abstracting of materials--can be split between a consortium of schools thus spreading out both the benefits of having a clearinghouse and the workload. The first step that we need to take, however, is the formation of a mission statement from MCB to our parent organization (AEJMC). This statement should include why the clearinghouse is needed, why this particular organization should sponsor its creation, and how MCB will get the project started.

ELECTRONIC BULLETIN BOARDS

While we are forming our mission statement and seeking preliminary funds for the clearinghouse, we can start using one other new technology, the electronic bulletin board (EBB). The EBB may in fact be the oldest of the new technologies. From the beginning of the microcomputer, users have tried to find ways to share their experiences and knowledge. The EBB was created for just this purpose. All types of information are present on the EBB, from software programs that help users run their machines faster and better to inhome shopping to dating. A whole industry grown up out of the EBB. I'm sure that we all are familiar with the Compuserve company based in Columbus, Ohio. Compuserve serves, one might say, as a large electronic mall where people from across the country (for a price) can meet and share ideas and information. What I propose is that we form our own electronic bulletin board and base it in the main frame computer of one the universities represented by this group. All members would commit themselves to a set amount of money to cover computer time costs and EBB maintenance. The EBB could contain

bibliographies from user education courses, curriculum guides and lectures, and general news that would be of value to the members of this interest group. The cost of such a system would be slight, for--as mentioned above--users of the EBB could dedicate funds to support computer time and maintenance. Another possibility would be to request the support of one of our universities to absorb the cost of running the system. All entry of data in the system would be done by the users of the system, ourselves. A working EBB would enhance our ability to influence ERIC to develop a clearinghouse. The governing board of ERIC would see this as a strong sign that we want a clearinghouse and that we are willing to support one. We would also be saving ourselves money by placing our newsletter on the EBB. Information would travel quickly between members and we would be grow into a stronger group. Our electronic bulletin board could also serve as a model for other members of the library profession. If our EBB is successful, then others such as LOEX may with to follow our example.

CONCLUSION

What are the new technologies? We knew the answer to that at the start of this paper. The new technologies are microcomputer based or accessed. They are a means to an end--better access to information for both us and our patrons. How can we get them? We get them by taking the initiative. In the matter of online databases and CD ROMs, we communicate as individuals and as a national organization to DIALOG and BRS our needs and suggestions. We also must communicate with the

producers of printed indexes and abstracts like Sage Publication's Communication Abstracts telling them that their services would be used more often and in a more efficient manner if they were published in an automated format. A clearinghouse will become a reality only after we are willing to lobby for it and show why there is a need for its creation. Funds for a clearinghouse will not mysteriously appear from an unknown donor, rather they are found through serious planning and initiative. Finally, an electronic bulletin board can be easily established once a central site and coordinator are selected. Why don't we already have these new technologies in place and running? We know the answer to that also--we have not yet taken the first steps in asking for them.